

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

from **Senator Rosa Franklin**

Olympia Office:
312 Legislative Building
PO Box 40429
Olympia, WA 98504-0429



Telephone:
(360) 786-7656
FAX: (360) 786-7520
Toll-free: 1-800-562-6000

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Fast, furious, and wonderfully productive! Not only that, but the Legislature finished its business a day ahead of schedule while enacting some truly significant legislation. Among the major bills passed were:

- **Medical Malpractice Breakthrough.** With Gov. Christine Gregoire helping to bridge the differences between physicians and lawyers, the legislature passed a comprehensive bill that will improve patient safety and set up a voluntary arbitration system to settle malpractice disputes. It was a welcome and long overdue compromise!
- **Unemployment insurance (UI):** Benefits for laid-off workers will be protected and improved, while businesses' payments into the system will decrease under a bipartisan agreement hammered out in the final hours of the session. This represents a big win for workers and employers!
- **Alternatives to the WASL.** This year's 10th-graders will be the first students required to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to graduate. Recognizing that there are other ways students can demonstrate their knowledge and skills, the Legislature is providing alternative methods for students to show their competency and graduate.

Finally, I was particularly proud of what we did this session to reduce health care disparities. The package of bills I sponsored should help put us on the path to being the healthiest state in the nation.

In this newsletter, you will find additional information about these and other major accomplishments of the 2006 session.

Warmly,

Rosa Franklin
Rosa Franklin



Making Health Care More Affordable

For a short session, we made great progress on health care issues. We made a significant investment in our public health system so we will be ready if there is an avian flu outbreak. We expanded access to health care services for thousands of low-income children and adults. We addressed health care disparities in a meaningful way. Highlights included:

- **Pandemic Influenza.** Experts are convinced that a pandemic outbreak of avian flu is inevitable. Under some scenarios, an outbreak in Washington could lead to as many as 198,000 hospitalizations and up to 38,000 deaths. Believing it's better to be ready than sorry, **Senate Bill 6366** requires local health districts to develop emergency response plans and provides \$9 million in additional resources so they can get the job done.
- **Small Business Partnership Program/House Bill 2572.** Thanks to this legislation, employers with low-income workers will be able to find more affordable coverage. Targeted at employers with 50 or fewer employees, the program provides premium assistance to employees who have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (\$17,960 for an individual, \$30,520 for a family of three). To be eligible, the employer must pay at least 40 percent of the premium. The program will begin on July 1, 2007.
- **Basic Health Plan (BHP) Expansion.** An additional 6,500 low-income adults will be able to enroll in the BHP, bringing total enrollment in this affordable plan to 106,500.
- **Children's Health Insurance.** Last session, the Legislature made a commitment to ensure that all children in Washington have health care coverage by 2010. To stay on target, this year's budget provides additional funding so 10,000 more children can be covered through the Immigrant Children's Health Program.
- **Medicare Prescription Drug Co-pays.** With the implementation of the new Medicare Part D prescription benefit, nearly 100,000 of our most medically vulnerable residents were transferred into the new federal prescription drug program. Thanks to new funding in the state budget, these low-income seniors will not have to pay the co-pay for each prescription.
- **Mental health services.** The supplemental budget boosted funding for public mental health services by \$22 million, allowing more low-income people to receive help with mental illnesses. In addition, Western State Hospital will receive funding to open more wards.

Health Care Disparities: Equal treatment and access to health care services is critical to the well-being of all Washington residents, particularly if we are serious about wanting to be the healthiest state in the nation. That is why we passed a comprehensive set of bills I sponsored – a package that will help make our state a leader in closing the disparities gap and ensuring that racial and ethnic minorities receive equal health care treatment.

- **Senate Bill 6193.** To enhance the quality of care provided to racial and ethnic minorities, experts believe that increasing the diversity of the health-care work force is critical. This measure requires the state to conduct biannual surveys to determine the demographics of the work force so we know where we stand and where we have to go.
- **Senate Bill 6194** is designed to enhance the "cultural competency" of health professionals by requiring (by 2008) that health profession education programs include instruction on the topic.



Supporting Veterans

To recognize their service to the nation, the Legislature enacted a number of bills this session to help returning veterans, including:

- **Tuition waivers.** More veterans will be eligible to receive tuition waivers at the state's institutions of higher education.
- **Veterans Innovations Program.** Under this program, veterans will be able to get additional assistance to help them get job training, education, health care and housing.
- **Home ownership Assistance.** This is an effort to help veterans, their widows or their dependents purchase a home.
- **Depleted Uranium.** Our service men and women may have been exposed to high levels of depleted uranium, which has been used extensively in armor-piercing munitions and in tank armor in Iraq and Afghanistan. To address health concerns, the Legislature is funding a study to determine whether exposure to depleted uranium is harming our returning soldiers.
- **Tax deferment.** Veterans with income of less than \$40,000 will be able to defer property taxes on up to five acres.

For more information, contact the Washington State Dept. of Veterans Affairs at (800) 562-2308.

Alternative Energy and Cleaner Water

- **Cleaning up Puget Sound.** Steps were taken to ensure clearer waters throughout Puget Sound by requiring local health districts to develop plans to repair failing septic systems.
- **Renewable fuels.** To promote cleaner air and reduce reliance on gasoline, the Legislature is requiring that automotive fuels sold here contain a minimum amount of bio-fuels by 2008.
- **Low-income heating assistance.** With energy bills climbing higher this winter, the Legislature increased funding for the Low-Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program so 14,000 more Washington families will have lower heating bills.



- **Recycling E-Waste.** Manufacturers of TVs and computers will now work in partnership with the state to establish recycling programs so old electronic items are discarded safely and without spoiling the environment.

Building a Better Education System

- **Alternatives to the WASL.** Not all students excel on traditional academic tests, such as the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). That is why the Legislature this session created alternative ways for students to graduate from high school. These options will include a portfolio of student work, a certain score on the SAT, PSAT or ACT, or completion of a vocational program. In addition, the budget

allocates \$28 million in additional funding to provide extra help so students can achieve high academic standards.

- **Expanding enrollments at college.** An additional 500 students will have the opportunity to get an affordable college education at one of Washington's public universities or community colleges, thanks to an increase in funding.

Other Statewide Issues

Affordable Housing. We must provide a variety of affordable and attractive housing choices in our cities. Toward that goal, the legislature approved a \$21 million boost in funding to make more affordable housing units available.

Sex offenders. In the aftermath of several frightening child sex abuse cases, lawmakers adopted a package of bills that crack down on sex offenders, including setting a minimum 25-year sentence for certain cases involving child rape or molestation.

Tougher drunk driving laws. Driving under the influence can land a repeat offender in prison under a new law that makes five DUI convictions within 10 years a felony, rather than the misdemeanor it currently is.

Civil Rights, Anti-discrimination Law. Nearly 30 years after first considering it, the legislature took action to prohibit discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation.

Adoptions. The Department of Social and Health Services will conduct a study to determine whether there are barriers that make it hard to adopt a child out of the foster care system, particularly minority children.

Removing state parks' parking fees. The Legislature repealed the unpopular \$5 parking fees, which should bring more families back to our parks.

29th District: Local Issues

- **Cheney Stadium.** To modernize the home of the Tacoma Rainiers, the supplemental budget provides \$2.5 million to help with restoration and repairs.
- **Wapato Lake Cleanup.** Building upon the \$50,000 in funding provided by the state last year, this session the legislature allocated \$250,000 to restore the lake. But even with that, we will need to do more so that eventually children will be able to swim in the lake again.
- **University of Washington at Tacoma.** \$4 million was appropriated to acquire additional land for expansion of the UW-Tacoma campus.
- **Bates Community and Technical College.** Funding was provided to allow 187 more students to enroll in community college programs that offer training in high-demand fields, which will likely boost enrollments at Bates.

Thanks to our 2006 legislative pages for all their hard work!



Rebecca Anderson



Marques Ford



Min Lee



Yvonna Peterson

Town Hall Notice

May 23 – 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Manitou Park Elementary School
4330 S. 66th St.
Tacoma, WA 98409

May 24 – 11:00 am - 12:00 pm
Lighthouse Senior Center
5016 A St.
Tacoma, WA 98408-7615



PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Olympia, WA
Permit #133

312 Legislative Building
PO Box 40429
Olympia, WA 98504-0429

Senator Rosa Franklin